

Addendum to Providence School Board's Notice of Non-Opposition

Recommendations Relative to the Turnaround Plan for Providence Public School District

Background

The Providence School Board consists of nine Providence residents appointed by the Mayor, with consent of the City Council, to serve three-year terms. Individuals are nominated through a public interview process, and candidates are recommended to the Mayor. The School Board provides management oversight of the district, including disciplinary hearings and approval of all contracts and policies.

Members come from diverse backgrounds with expertise to support their roles and responsibilities as School Board members. Current School Board members are professionals working in the areas of finance, social work, law, post-secondary education, management, and community organizing. Five of the nine members are alumni of Providence Public Schools, and a third of the School Board members are parents of current PPSD students. All of the Board members have agreed to serve only for the purpose of devoting their skills and experiences towards improving a school system that is so important to the future of our city and state.

Purpose and Context

The recommendations detailed in this document represent critical focus areas the School Board has identified as key to improving academic outcomes for Providence students. This document is a starting point to build upon in the coming weeks and months, and is by no means intended to be an exhaustive list of recommendations, but includes the areas we believe to be central to transforming our schools, based on our knowledge and experience of the systemic operational, governance, and cultural challenges that exist. The School Board is committed to providing continued input into the development of the Providence Public School District Turnaround Plan and goals, and oversight of the Plan once approved.

We have seen and experienced firsthand the struggles and obstacles that have impeded student success and demoralized staff. But we also have seen the collaboration among educators, the passion of our teachers and our students, and the drive to teach and to learn. We know what is working, and we know what is getting in the way, and so do our teachers, principals, administrators, our students and families. The entire PPSD community is critical to the success of the District Turnaround Plan.

Many of the recommendations herein require changes to the existing collective bargaining agreements with teachers and other school department staff, while others require amendments to state law, city ordinances/city charter, and/or Rhode Island Department of Education regulations. Many of the items identified in this document are matters that the Board and district have been working on for many years; some are items we have just undertaken; and others are areas where the Board's efforts to improve the school system have been stymied by matters beyond its direct control, which have amounted to insurmountable obstacles to progress under the system as it exists today.

The School Board—current and past—has proposed and/or attempted to implement versions of these recommendations, but has been repeatedly hindered, due to a variety of reasons. Lack of consistent leadership at the Rhode Island Department of Education, unsuccessful attempts to achieve legislative and contractual amendments, inequitable state funding, continually changing standards and testing, and minimal

capacity of state agencies to provide adequate supports to urban school districts, all have contributed to the lack of progress in these critical areas. Additionally, unlike most school boards, we do not have the authority to negotiate teacher contracts, which means that we lack a fundamental tool to impact what happens in the classroom.

We anticipate that the Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education, with the authority granted her under the Final Decision and Order Establishing Control Over the Providence Public School District and Reconstituting Providence Schools, will have the resources and tools required to effectuate the necessary changes and succeed where we have thus far not been able to succeed.

Recommendations

Focus Area 1: Teaching & Learning

We recommend the following short- and long-term changes to instructional leadership and practices.

- 1) Provide staffing that allows for two teachers per class through Grade 3.
- 2) Implement a longer school day.
- 3) Extend the school year to include additional days of instruction, and at least five days of mandatory professional development for teachers.
- 4) Develop a training program that creates an alternate pathway to certify substitute teachers.
- 5) Utilize the Rhode Island Department of Education Teacher Evaluation Model, and establish firm timeframes to improve poor performance.
- 6) Provide consistency in support and protocol from Human Resources related to disciplinary procedures and response.
- 7) Implement true criterion-based hiring; address timeline for hiring that eliminates need for internal hiring rounds.
- 8) Eliminate unpaid 12-month leaves for alternate employment.
- 9) Examine collective bargaining agreement's allowance of 17 sick days for teachers; PPSD identifies chronic absenteeism as 18 sick days.
- 10) Allow for greater administrative/management decision-making related to in-school assignments and scheduling to meet instructional needs at the school.
- 11) Review collective bargaining agreement for additional practices that are no longer used, or are no longer practicable.

Focus Area 2: School Leadership, and School-Level Best Practices

The following are practices and standards that we believe will have immediate positive impact at the school level. Many of these initiatives have begun but have not yet been able to be fully accomplished or implemented to the fullest extent required to achieve the broadest impact.

- 1) Provide administrative staffing at schools based on student population, with a minimum of one principal and one assistant principal at each school.
- 2) Build out a full Safe and Caring Team at every school. Supplement Safe and Caring Teams with Community Health Worker program which will train parents to provide support in this role.
- 3) Ensure school staff, including main office staff is multilingual and culturally responsive to the needs of its students and parents.
- 4) Continued use of Rhode Island Department of Education Administrator Evaluation model with expectations of improvement when necessary within a one-year period, or as determined.

- 5) Institute mandatory professional development for school leaders to include at minimum the areas of business operations, human resources, finance and budgeting, in conjunction with PLUs.
- 6) Regular review of school-level suspension data and disciplinary processes to ensure restorative practices are embedded in school culture.
- 7) Ensure all curricular resources are culturally responsive, meet high standards, and are reflective of a school leader's choice.
- 8) Every school level should have adequate number of academic coaches.

Focus Area 3: District-Level Practices and Systems Overhaul

We recommend the following to restructure essential divisions, operations and systems.

- 1) Create an Equity Office to recognize, respect and value diverse communities in hiring, committee appointments, focus groups, community outreach, curriculum and professional development.
- 2) Restructure human resources to support zone model.
- 3) Ensure full implementation of Department of Justice consent decrees for ELL and Special Education.
- 4) Eliminate August vacations for all 12 month employees.
- 5) Restructure Student Affairs Office to support a zone model.
- 6) Create highly visible paid/credit-bearing internships and strategic partnerships with local colleges in high need areas in the District.
- 7) Increase development focus to strategic partnerships for outside funding.
- 8) Implement impact-based budgeting.
- 9) Maintain independent school department Chief Financial Officer/Business Manager that reports to the Superintendent, not the City's Chief Financial Officer.
- 10) Continue the implementation of the school safety improvements recommended by Providence Police Department pursuant to a requested audit from the School Board.
- 11) Ensure that every middle and high school has a functioning, resourced, teacher-supported student government and mechanisms for widespread inclusion.
- 12) Require at least one civics and one art class or equivalent in middle and high school.
- 13) Require at least two parent-teacher conferences per school year, scheduled in a way that all parents/guardians can fully participate, regardless of work schedule or language.

Focus Area 4: Families and Community

The School Board recommends consideration of certain structural and staffing realignments to ensure families and community have more opportunities to engage, advocate and support on behalf of our students and schools.

- 1) Open a Welcome Center that would be accessible to families and community and house Transportation, Registration, Central Records, Family and Community Engagement, with cross-functionally trained staff.
- 2) Create Parent/Family Ambassadors to support positive culture and climate in the schools.
- 3) Assign Parent Engagement Specialists by zones to schools, and assess staffing needs of Family and Community Engagement office.
- 4) Develop a school-based mentorship programs with PPSD alumni.
- 5) Identify a more impactful role for School Culture Coordinators.
- 6) Provide adult education opportunities (formal and informal) in PPSD buildings.
- 7) Institute home visits prior to the start of school for pre-K through Grade 3 students by teachers/principals/counselors, as appropriate.

Focus Area 5: District Policy

Below is a list of existing policies that should be re-visited and potentially amended, new policies to be developed, recommendations for administrative regulations, and best practices for accountability related to policies. These recommendations have been a priority of the School Board and have been started/implemented to various degrees.

- 1) Student Assignment Policy—complete the review and potential amendment to reflect demand for neighborhood schools.
- 2) Select some neighborhood schools to operate as full-service community schools as a pilot, similar to those in New York City with longer hours, six days/week, with health and mental health professionals in the building, et cetera, with goal of bringing to scale district-wide.
- 3) Establish policy that reaffirms true Criterion-Based Hiring.
- 4) A full folio of Human Capital policies needs to be developed, with an emphasis on hiring for diversity/inclusion.
- 5) Student Code of Conduct—1) amend to eliminate suspensions at the elementary level; 2) provide professional development that will allow for full implementation of the code of conduct.
- 6) Develop a policy to end the practice of social promotion.
- 7) Ensure regulations are developed to properly implement the Multi-Tiered Systems of Support policy and continue to embed social emotional learning practices at all levels district-wide.
- 8) Overhaul facilities policies to ensure accountability and high standards related to maintenance and repairs and that require certification of safe, healthy, and clean facilities.
- 9) Expansion of ethnic studies curriculum (culturally relevant/responsible curriculum) in every middle and high school, with the long-term goal of integrating into all history/social studies/ELA classes.
- 10) Establish criteria for schools to earn criteria under the existing School Board policy.
- 11) Equitable funding of field trips, to ensure that all students have opportunities to learn outside of the classroom

Focus Area 6: Legislative and Regulatory Changes

The School Board recommends the examination of legislative and regulatory actions listed below to help expand and diversify the teacher pipeline; encourage and incentivize teaching as a career option; provide long-term equitable funding to districts to educate all students; promote early childhood education; empower student and family voice; and other initiatives we believe will allow for long-term, sustainable change in Providence schools.

- 1) Eliminate non-medical leaves of absence for teachers and administrators (Rhode Island General Law).
- 2) Extend the teacher tenure process, to include a minimum of five years of high performance reviews (Rhode Island General Law).
- 3) Constitutional amendment right to education (Ballot Question).
- 4) Advocate to embed funding for English Learners in the education funding formula (Rhode Island General Law).
- 5) Implement universal pre-K (Rhode Island General Law/RIDE).
- 6) Provide tax credits to incentivize EL/Special Education certifications (RI General Law/RIDE).
- 7) Incentivize teaching by offering free tuition/student loan forgiveness/tax incentives to students in teacher education programs at Community College of Rhode Island, Rhode Island College and University Rhode Island (RI General Law).
- 8) Eliminate SAT requirements for teacher certification (RIDE).

- 9) Ensure comprehensive equity approach for entire teacher certification process (RIDE).
- 10) Provide credits for experiential learning for teacher assistants seeking teaching degrees.
- 11) Revisit language relating to “evergreen” collective bargaining agreements (Rhode Island General Law).
- 12) Consider amending licensing requirements for afterschool programs (DCYF is currently the licensing body) as well as DHS subsidy eligibility.
- 13) Return authority to negotiate all contracts to Providence School Board, or whatever potential replacement of the School Board which resumes local oversight of the School District, at end of turnaround period (Rhode Island General Law).

Conclusion

Every member of the Providence School Board is a parent of a current student, attended Providence schools growing up, and/or has worked directly and regularly with Providence students as part of their day jobs. We care deeply and personally about what happens to Providence schools, our 24,000 students and their families, and our 3,200 teachers and staff. We have included these suggestions in an effort to help the Commissioner as she takes on this monumental undertaking that all current and previous Board members have come to this Board with the same intent to take on. Hopefully, with the implementation of the Crowley Act in Providence and with the expanded powers associated therewith, we can finally achieve meaningful improvement of a school system we also care deeply about. It is what our children deserve and it is essential to the vitality and economic health of our city.

The forthcoming Turnaround Plan should incorporate the above recommendations, which include broad governance and systems changes, as well as baseline professional expectations and norms for those teaching and working in the education field.

A recent report by the Rockefeller Institute of Government states, “A plan to transform a persistently failing school could be constructed as a performance contract, and periodic reporting on agreed-upon accountability standards focused on achievement goals may be the only critical element of government intervention needed.”¹

We expect that the PPSD Turnaround Plan will be used in the manner of a performance contract, with accountability metrics and regular reports to stakeholders built into the plan.

We also expect that the plan will be developed collaboratively with stakeholders including the Providence School Board, school leaders, educators, students, parents, families, city leaders and community leaders.

Finally, we expect a return to local authority and control at the end of the intervention period.

¹ “School Turnaround Efforts. What’s Been Tried, Why Those Efforts Failed, and What to Do Now,” p. 46, Rockefeller Institute of Government, July 2019